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ABSTRACT

Acknowledging that consumers need to look for certain information on store coupons, this lesson plan uses the overhead projector for teaching elementary school students how to systematically read and use coupons. The lesson emphasizes informed consumerism and provides a practical opportunity for students to apply the skills of vocabulary development and following instructions. In addition, it teaches students to identify the expiration date of the coupon, special conditions for using it, the period of time when it may be used, and the number of items to which the discount applies. Follow-up activities are included. (HTH)

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A TEACHING STRATEGY FOR READING COUPONS

A Paper Presented at the
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A TEACHING STRATEGY
FOR READING COUPONS

A penny saved is still a penny earned. Consumers of all ages are saving and refunding coupons at fast food restaurants, grocery stores, drugstores, or almost anyplace where purchases are made. Coupons are printed advertisements which entitle the bearer to a saving. To get the saving the coupon has to either be surrendered at the time of purchase or mailed to the sponsoring company. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that four out of five families use coupons. Last year manufacturers distributed 90.6 billion coupons at a cost of $855.4 million. And this figure does not include coupons distributed for fast foods or cut from the newspaper. About 500 new coupon offers are made each month. But, only about 4 percent of the coupons are ever redeemed. Students need to become informed coupon consumers to take advantage of coupon savings.

Using coupons focuses on the importance of thrift and saving. With today's high prices and inflationary economic trends it is more important than ever for a student to be an informed coupon user to help cut costs. Knowing how to go about reading coupons is a necessary skill for anyone who wants to get the most for their money.

Coupons need to be read carefully in order to be used efffectively. What is the coupon for--a product or a service? What kind of saving

is it--a price cut, free item, cash rebate, or a premium? What conditions are required to use the coupon--with purchase of seven dollars or more, buy one and get one free, or with giant economy size only? What does the bearer do with the coupon--refund it locally or mail it away? How many can you buy with the coupon--limit 1 to a customer or limit 3 per coupon?

A consumer needs to look for certain information on a coupon. How can teachers help their students to become informed coupon users? This article describes a classroom lesson plan with the overhead projector for teaching students how to systematically go about reading and using coupons. The lesson emphasizes informed consumerism and provides a practical opportunity for students to apply the skills of vocabulary development and following directions.

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LESSON PLAN FOR READING AND USING COUPONS

Planning

Cut several coupons from the local newspaper and make overhead transparencies. Include coupons for products which the students use in their daily lives, such as for fast food and grooming items. Also include coupons for services, such as for a hair cut, manicure, or car wash. Use the transparencies during the lesson to initiate discussion and to show as examples of coupon information. Bring to class extra coupons or bring magazines and newspaper pages or product wrappers which have coupons printed on them.

Introduction

--What are coupons?

Display a transparency showing coupons. Ask for a definition of coupon (pieces of paper which make things you buy cheaper, a dated form which entitles you to get something in exchange, something that saves you money, kind of like money when you buy something). Write a definition on the transparency.

--Where do you find coupons?

Discuss where we find coupons, such as in newspapers and magazines, printed on product containers or wrappers, inside a product box, distributed at stores, sent to you in the mail. Hand out a few real coupons as students contribute to the discussion.

--How can coupons help us?

Explain how coupons can help save money, such as by helping us to be a thrifty shopper and a wise consumer. Make a list on a transparency as students suggest ways in which coupons help us. Point out that only about 4 percent of the coupons are redeemed and that perhaps part of the reason for this low refund count is that many consumers may not know how to systematically read and use coupons.

Purpose

Write on a transparency:

How do you go about reading a coupon?

Development

Direct attention to the purpose question. Explain that a coupon has important information printed on it. Anyone can systematically read a coupon by asking seven questions and seeking the answers from the coupon. Use the transparencies to point out, or have the students underline, specific coupon information as each of the following questions is discussed.

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1 When does the coupon expire?

Put on the chalkboard the vocabulary words--expire, expiration date, expired. Build word meanings by pointing out examples on the coupon transparencies. Sometimes newspaper coupons do not have an expiration date printed on them; the date appears someplace else in the general ad. Help the students to understand that if the coupon has expired, or if they can not use the coupon before it expires, then there is little need to read any more of the coupon.

2 What can I get with the coupon?

A coupon will be for a product or a service; it might be for anything from auto accessories to zoo tickets. Discuss that as wise consumers they must decide if they want or need that particular product or service. If not, there is little reason to continue reading the coupon.

3 Where can I use the coupon?

Some coupons are good anywhere in the United States; others can be used at only specific locations. Discuss the effect location makes on a decision to use or discard the coupon. Show on a transparency that the location may not be printed on the coupon but, instead, may be located elsewhere in the general ad.

4 What are the special conditions for using the coupon?

A coupon reader must now identify the special conditions which are required to get the saving. Build word meanings for discount, proof of purchase, premium, cash rebate, face value, refund, redemption policy. Help the students understand that various coupons have different conditions which the consumer must follow

in order to get the saving. Discuss coupon conditions and use the transparencies to illustrate points of the discussion. Special coupon conditions might include:

-Buy a certain size; "$1 off any large pizza"

-Buy an item and get the same or a different item free or at a reduced price; "Free soft drink when you buy a chicken sandwich"

-Buy an item and get a specified amount off the regular price; "Save 25¢ when you buy any size shampoo"

-Get a discount on any purchase at the store; "15% off your entire purchase at cash register"

-Buy an item(s), save proof of purchase and mail away for more coupons or a cash refund; "Mail this form with 4 proof of purchase from any size package and receive 75¢ cash refund"

-Buy an item(s), save proof of purchase and mail away for a free or inexpensive premium; "Mail 2 proof of purchase from 2 boxes with this order form and get another box free"

5 What do I do with the coupon?

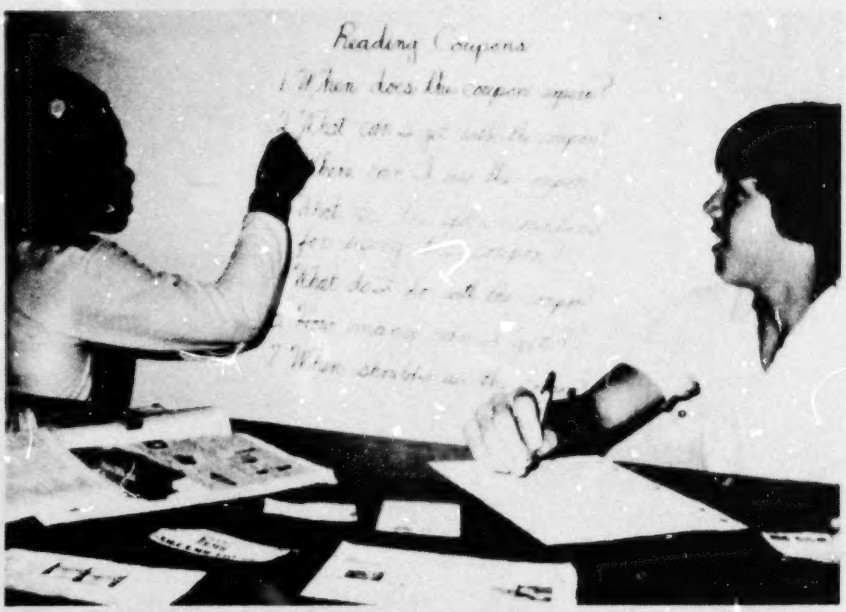
Some coupons are turned in when you buy an item; others have to be mailed to the company. Discuss the coupon's value in relation to the specifications for using the coupon.

6 How many can I get?

Some purchases with a coupon may be limited to one offer per coupon per customer. Other purchases with a coupon are limited only by the number of coupons you have to turn in. Help students identify the coupon restrictions on the coupon transparencies.

7 When should I use the coupon?

Point out that some coupons are good for specific hours, such as from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. Explain that some stores offer double coupon days; this means that the coupon becomes worth twice its face value on that particular day. Help students reason which coupons might be held and those which should be used right away. The fact that some businesses accept only their own coupons would be a deciding factor. The expiration date would also be a consideration. Use the transparencies and help students judge when the best time would be to use the displayed coupons.



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Evaluation

How do you go about reading a coupon? Ask for an oral answer to the purpose question. Write the seven questions on a transparency or a chart as the students respond. Then distribute coupons or the newspaper and magazine pages and product wrappers which have coupons printed on them. Ask the students to follow the questions and label the coupon with the numbers from 1 to 7 with each labeled number on the coupon identifying the answer to the corresponding question on the transparency. The labeled numbers identifying the correct coupon information serve as the evaluation for the lesson.

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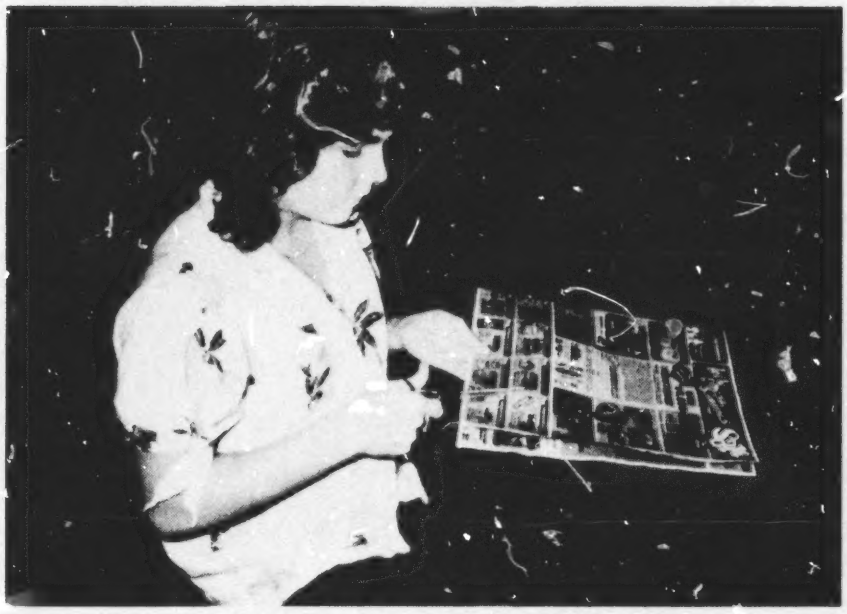

Follow-Up Activities

Many interesting activities can be used to follow-up or extend the lesson. Students can:

--Define special coupon abbreviations and make a dictionary. They can begin with such abbreviations as POP (proof of purchase), C/O (cents off), P/H (postage and handling), and SASE (self-addressed stamped envelope).

--Contact local coupon saver clubs or exchanges where members trade coupons and arrange for a member to come to school as a guest speaker.

--Interview the owner or manager of a store which accepts coupons. Have the interview focus on the arrangements which the store follows to get their money after the customer turns in the coupon.

--Design a flow chart for using coupons with such decision steps as read, clip, file, use, refund, save.

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--Set up a coupon money-saver club. Coupons can be traded just like baseball cards. Students can learn to organize their coupons by separating them according to dategory and date of expiration.

--Save and refund coupons for a month and keep a record of the savings. Saving and refunding coupons can become an interesting hobby.

--Collect coupons and make a list of the different conditions required by the various coupons to get a saving.

--Prepare and use an outline format to systematically seek coupon information, such as:

Reading and Using Coupons

1. Expiration date _____
2. Product or service _____
3. Store location _____
4. Coupon conditions _____
5. Save or mail _____
6. Quantity _____
7. Keep or use now _____

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Summary

To get the most savings from coupons it is important to use them properly. How should students go about reading and using coupons? What information should they look for? This lesson plan can be used with an overhead projector to systematically teach students how to go about reading and using coupons. The lesson stresses consumer knowledge as well as the practical application of reading and reasoning skills.

Note: Photographs from Pines Middle School, Pembroke Pines, FL